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Nunavut
Arctic College



Guidelines

for working with Inuit elders



Guidelines for working with Inuit elders

written by

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in consultation with the
Language and Culture Committee
of Nunavut Arctic College

2008



**Nunavut
Arctic College**

Table of Contents

- 4 Preface
- 5 Guidelines for working with Inuit elders
- 6 Cultural activities
- 7 Showing respect for elders
 - Payments to elders
 - Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* traditional knowledge
- 8 *Pinasuaqtavut*
 - Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* guiding principles
- 11 Nunavut Arctic College teaching and learning principles
 - Interviewing an elder



- 13 The value of storytelling and legends
- 14 Summary

Learning Activities

- 15 Working with Inuit elders
- 17 *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* traditional knowledge
- 18 Interviewing an elder
 - Storytelling and legends



Pedagogy was strongly based upon modeling, observation and practice.

Preface

The following guidelines address how to work with Inuit elders who may have little or no experience working in a formal workplace. These guidelines will help us better understand their expectations and meet their needs as individuals and respected members of our communities. Inuit elders have always lived on the land before they were relocated to the communities, and they have a strong sense of belonging – to the land and to their family.

It should be understood that the identification of “elders” as culture-bearers is not simply a matter of chronological age, but a function of the respect accorded to individuals in each community who exemplify the values and lifestyles of the local culture.

Respected elders are role models in each community who serve as advisors, philosophers and professors.¹ Elders play an important role in keeping the strength of close-knit families, that is being lost. Many aspects of cultural knowledge can be learned from other members of the community who have not yet been

recognized as elders, but seek to practice and teach local lifestyles in culturally-appropriate ways.

It is our hope that you will find this information useful. Inuit elders have to be recognized as primary sources of language expertise and cultural advisors possessing wisdom and knowledge that can be passed on to future generations. The purpose of these guidelines is to offer assistance to educators and other professionals – both Inuit and non-Inuit – who may have an interest in working with Inuit elders. A number of sample learning activities are also included to provide a starting point for your work with elders in the classroom.

Further information on issues related to the implementation of these guidelines as well as additional copies of the booklet may be obtained from Nunavut Arctic College – Head Office, PO Box 230, Arviat, Nunavut X0C 0E0 (<http://www.nac.nu.ca>).

¹ Inuit Qaujijamatuqangiit Department of Education



but now reconciliation is underway and Inuit are starting to regain their strengths and pride for who they are.²

As Inuit we still respect our elders regardless of status and family lineage. All of our Inuit elders have stories related to their knowledge and experience and the hardships they went through. For these reasons we do not fully understand the real truth or why most have remained so humbly quiet. The healing process has begun for some Inuit but most have not told their stories yet and some have passed on. Most of our elders are sitting back, unable to get control of their younger generation due to afflictions that have overshadowed their families.

When Inuit lived in the land, the land itself, the family, and the small extended family or camp were the source of learning – they were “the classroom.” The teachers were the parents and elders. Wisdom and experience was passed on from generation to generation. Pedagogy was strongly based upon modeling, observation and practice.³

Our elders are the ones with the most knowledge – knowledge that they have gained over the course of their lifetimes. Traditionally Inuit had elders who had gifts of traditional words of advice – **uqaujjuusiat** – that were available when they were needed. It is Inuit custom that younger people not ask too many questions to an older person but this has changed for the younger generation, although some still respect these values. Inuktitut language has changed over time to the point where elders use terms and phrases that many young people cannot understand. It is unfortunate that many youth have not retained enough of their language skills to be able to speak freely with their elders.

By increasing young Inuit self-esteem, some of today’s social problems such as substance abuse and even suicide will be eliminated.

Guidelines for working with Inuit elders

Although Inuit elders are highly regarded, valued and respected, most of them have to relearn their prospective roles in society. The impacts of colonization have impaired them, and they need to regain their positions as guides and teachers of the younger generations. This was always their role. Despite the massive changes that have at times threatened to overwhelm Inuit society, they have endured to keep their basic values. Those who had endured such tragic experiences still remain quiet probably due to the pain it will open. Inuit elders are beginning to be recognized for their role as advisors and counselors in higher positions such as in justice and education. The tremendous experiences they have undergone during colonization such as the relocations, residential schools and dog slaughters are few of the stories that are being dealt with today.

Our parents and grandparents experienced a time when their independence and human rights were stolen. There was a time when many Inuit did not have pride in their identity but this is now changing. Inuit have encountered racial discrimination in the past

² Looking Back by John Amagoalik

³ Nunavut Literacy Development in the Context of IQ, 2002, published by the Nunavut Literacy Council

Elder members of the family held positions of high esteem in the household and the community. While not being as active in their contribution to the feeding and clothing of the family as they once been, they were nonetheless respected for their great knowledge, wisdom and storytelling abilities. They were often sought for their advice on particular issues and took an active role in child rearing.⁴

Elders know a lot of history but this knowledge has never been recorded. They deserve the respect due to them because they have lived and experienced long life, gaining wisdom and traditional knowledge. They can tell us about their life experiences, such as where they grew up and how they made a living back then.

Inuit have always turned to one another to help achieve a goal. When food was scarce, the men would get together to hunt as a team. It is through this connection to the land, to wildlife and to each other, that Inuit have survived for centuries. Today however, where camp members once achieved goals through unity, competitiveness now drives our society.⁵

How to survive in a harsh environment, the study of the land and sea as well as the movements of animals, effects of the environment and the whole system of seasonal activities have to be taught. It should be a high priority now since very few of our knowledgeable elders remain.

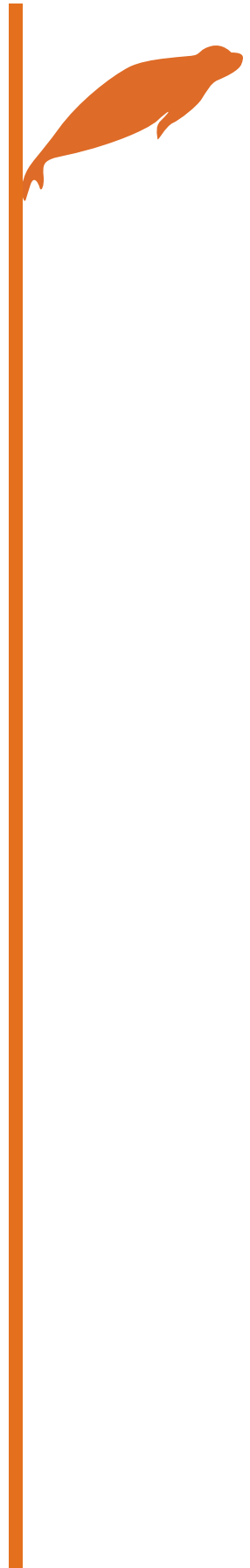
Cultural activities

On-going cultural orientation sessions are opportunities to learn more about Inuit culture and cross-cultural ties. Involving elders regularly on discussion and activity sessions about IQ guiding principles; values and beliefs; topics on traditional leadership; legends; storytelling; *pisiit* and chants; discipline and child rearing; games and skill acquisition; social roles; kinship terminology and many more topics provide opportunities for our students

and staff to learn. Specific topics such as kayak and sled making, iglu building, and dog training can be taught as well. Inuit males and females had clearly defined roles in the past so it is important to learn women's roles too, like kamik making, skin preparation and sewing all kinds of garments and skins; traditional methods of cooking and preserving food. All this Inuit knowledge has to be taught by involving elders as instructors.

There are different activities related to Inuit culture that people can participate in that are organized by various Inuit organizations and community groups. Projects like *Somebody's Daughter* and *Pijunnaqsiniq Program* in the Kivalliq region are available annually for interested people. These kinds of projects involve working with Inuit elders and space is limited. An educational system that supports Inuit culture and community life and instills pride and develops leadership skills that follow seasonal and environmental events is necessary. Participating in the study of our culture and learning about Inuit history promotes pride in our Inuit identity and helps our youth become stronger people. Check with your regional and community organizations to find out about cultural programs and activities in your area that you and/or your class may participate in.

In addition, all Government of Nunavut departments should have staff field trips or IQ days that focus on topics such as local archeological finds, land formations, games and feasts/celebrations, snow testing, tool making and many more things that can be learned out on the land. Support people can be hired to help us protect and promote Inuit culture and traditional language.



⁴ The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture, 2002, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada

⁵ Inuit and the Land as One by Brian Aglukark

Students will be expected to demonstrate this kind of leadership and commitment to serving the common good.

Showing respect for elders

Here are some examples of demonstrating honour and respect to an Inuk elder:

- The usual greeting is a smile and a handshake upon meeting and departing.
- **“Kinauvit”** What is your name? This phrase is more appropriate when you meet someone for the first time rather than **“Qanuipit?”** (How are you?).
- Always provide an interpreter if you are unable to speak in Inuktitut. An ideal interpreter would be an older person who understands the elder’s rich terminology as it is not equal to the younger person for clear understanding. Get someone who knows people and who is trusted by the community.
- Respect the elder because they get tired easily. An old saying is to treat others as you want others to treat you and to treat everybody equally with kindness.
- If you are taking them to your work place, check to see if s/he requires pick up; transport them yourself if possible. If they are working with you explain the form of payment and how long they will be working. If any tools or equipment are needed, check to see if they will provide it or if they need help in getting it.
- Find out what the elder is interested in and if it is okay to contact them later to assist in certain tasks or projects. If they agree, then make an appointment or meeting no longer than one (1) week in advance and follow up the day before to discuss details and to remind them.
- Ask if they have any further questions or anything to add because some remain quiet although they may have something to say.

Payments to elders

Nunavut Arctic College recognizes the knowledge and expertise of elders as being equal to other instructors who are not elders and reimburses them accordingly. Payments can take several forms. Honourariums are usually paid when an elder works with a class for a short period of time. In addition to an honourarium cheque, small gifts like a cup or a thermos with a college logo on it are also much appreciated. If they are teaching for a longer period of time, then the elder instructor should be paid at the same rate as other full-time instructors.

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (traditional knowledge)

“Things of which Inuit knew about all along”

What is Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit?

*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is the term for Inuit traditional knowledge and information passed down through oral history, customs and traditions. It encompasses all aspects of traditional Inuit culture including values, world views, language, social organization, knowledge, life skills, perceptions and expectations.*⁶

*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit means knowing the land, names, locations and their history. It also means knowledge of Arctic environments, snow, ice, water, weather and the environment around us. It also means being in harmony with people, land, living things and respecting them. There are life skills, alertness, the ability to train others, the strong healthy life, knowledge of language, culture and traditional beliefs and world view.*⁷

Why is Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit important? *Confirming the value of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit will restore Inuit pride and increase individual self-esteem. By increasing the self-esteem of young Inuit, some of today’s social problems such as substance abuse and even suicide will be eliminated.*⁸

6 Department of CLEY

7 Mark Kalluak, Elder Advisor, C&SS, Department of Education

8 Elder, September IQ Workshop, 1999 Department of Education

The Government of Nunavut is supporting the implementation of its IQ Guiding Principles so it is up to individual departments to ensure this vision is pursued. Ideas related to the IQ guiding principles that could be implemented and learning activities that could be taught have been included in this publication for your reference.

Pinasuaqtavut

Pinasuaqtavut is the title of a strategic document aimed at helping Government of Nunavut departments better understand how to use the guiding principles of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit in the workplace. *Pinasuaqtavut* means, what we are trying to achieve, in terms of goals or activities. There are four main areas that highlight the government's goals and commitments:

Inuuqatigiittiarniq – Healthy Communities

Pijarnirmiqsat Katujjiqatigiittiarnirlu – Simplicity and Unity

Namminiq Makitajunnarniq – Self Reliance

Ilippallianguinnarniq – Continuing Learning

All departments are expected to make changes within their organizations to ensure that their programs are culturally based and relevant to Nunavummiut.

Cultural orientation sessions are useful to help learn more about Inuit ways. This can be done through regular discussions and hands-on activities involving elders and staff that are knowledgeable and skilled in different areas. Organizing meaningful and concrete activities through planning and team work can be set up for new employees. For the elders social gatherings such as feasts and games are still important parts of being united. Celebrating first kills are still considered as important part of Inuit life. Sharing the first catch with others is still practiced at smaller communities in the North.

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit guiding principles

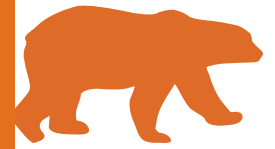
The guiding principles of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* should be the foundation of our daily workplace routines. We all must recognize that we need to work together and coordinate our approaches in all departments to reach the Government of Nunavut's *Pinasuaqtavut* goals. Here are some ideas from the Nunavut Arctic College Language and Culture Committee that demonstrates these principles in action.

Innuqatigiitsiarniq: Respecting others, relationships and caring for people.

- Learning and understanding who we are and our family connections, traditional naming, family trees, where we came from, willingness to work for a common purpose.
- Value the other person and their thoughts and ideas. Learn to be quiet and patient; an old Inuit saying is “good listeners make good leaders”.
- Respecting family protocols and traditions.
- Respect for self; respect for others; and taking responsibility for all your actions.
- Be willing to work as a team member and not only doing your job description. “Think outside the box”, “no job should be too big or too small”, “above or below”.
- Be ready and willing to learn anything, anytime, anywhere, and from anybody.

Tunnganarniq: fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive.

- If you notice someone who is in need of assistance, don't wait to be asked, rather ask how you can help and do it with a good natured spirit.
- Advise in a well meaning way, not judging others or their situations.





Family and community violence has a huge impact on the elders so we have to find ways to deal with physical and verbal abuse.

- Create a workplace that is welcoming and inclusive.
- Be approachable, flexible and supportive.
- Start conversations and be open to new ideas.

Pijitsirniq: concept of serving.

The concept of serving is central to the Inuit style of leadership and as such is the measure of the maturity and wisdom of an Inuk. The key here is the understanding that each person has a contribution to make and is a valued contributor to his/her community. Students will be expected to demonstrate this kind of leadership and commitment to serving the common good.

- Respectfully carrying out responsibilities and assisting co-workers or community members to accomplish their goals.
- Becoming a volunteer in your community so you will gain self-confidence, responsibility and trust from others.
- Picking up elders to and from their destination. You can also visit an elder. Make an effort to be helpful, shoveling an elder's steps, or helping to carry home their bags of groceries.

- Traditionally young girls used to carry babies and walk or play with younger children while their mothers sew. Caring for the relatives of others is a way to gain trust and practice.
- Helping others who are less fortunate to have a positive outlook later in life. Give people more than they expect and do it cheerfully, especially for those that tend to tire easily, or people who are physically handicapped.

Ajiiqatigiingniq: consensus decision making.

The concept of consensus decision making relies on strong communication skills and a strong belief in shared goals. All students are expected to become contributing members of their community and to participate actively in building the strength of Inuit in Nunavut. Being able to think and act collaboratively, to assist with the development of shared understandings, to resolve conflict in consensus-building ways, and to consult respecting various perspectives and worldviews, are expectations that cross all curriculum areas.

- Always strive for a positive learning and working environment.
- Showcase your 'Inukness' or *Inuuniit* through artifacts, history, family trees to help instill pride.
- Monthly meetings to promote language and culture within your workplace or your community. Have face to face meetings whenever possible.
- Plan and work as a team.
- Have open dialogue among your co-workers, ask individuals for input.
- Achievements involve taking risk.

Pilimmaksarniq: concept of skills and knowledge acquisition.

The concept of skills and knowledge acquisition and capacity building is central to the success of Inuit living in a harsh environment. Building personal capacity in Inuit ways of knowing and doing are key expectations for students. Demonstrating empowerment to lead a successful and productive life, that is respectful of all, is a powerful end goal of our educational system.

- Development of skills through practice, effort, action and patience.
- Have opportunities to learn new skills.
- Allowing room to instill or accommodate IQ values within the workplace.
- Allowing different departments to understand each other's job functions.

Piliriqatigiingniq: working together for a common cause.

The concept of developing collaborative relationships and working together for a common purpose. The essential Inuit belief that stresses the importance of the group over the individual should pervade all our teaching. Expectations for students will reflect working for the common good, collaboration, shared leadership and volunteerism. *Piliriqatigiingniq* also sets expectations for supportive behaviour development, strong relationship-building and consensus-building.

- Ask for input from the whole workplace, have brainstorming sessions.
- Strive to be a good role model in the workplace by leading healthy, productive lives.
- Promote community volunteerism.
- Team work is important.
- Be cooperative and strive for a productive workplace.

Qanuqtuurniq: being innovative and resourceful in seeking solutions.

The concept of being resourceful to solve problems, through innovative and creative use of resources and demonstrating adaptability and flexibility in response to a rapidly changing world, are strengths all our students should develop. Resourcefulness should be demonstrated in all learning and also thinking that seeks to improve the context in which Inuit live.

- Consistently asking for advice or ideas from elders.
- Utilizing traditional counseling as well as modern technology as a means of understanding the way we live and learn. Teaching coping skills and making plans for family members. Take criticism in a positive way, understanding that we are chastised because they care enough to make corrections in our mistakes and always give feedback.
- Find ways to integrate IQ into modern education methods.
- Exploring opportunities for improvement.
- Family and community violence has a huge impact on the elders so we have to find ways to deal with physical and verbal abuse.
- Find ways to deal with substance abuse such as drugs and alcohol because people who have never used it do not understand the struggle and the impact of the users.

Avatittingnik kamatsiarniq: respect and care for the land, animals and the environment.

The concept of environmental stewardship stresses the key relationships Inuit have with their environment and with the world in which they live. Students will be expected to articulate respect for this mutually interdependent relationship and to demonstrate responsible behaviours



Usually the best interview is two elders discussing a certain topic.

that seek to improve and protect the relationship in ways that meet global challenges to environmental wellness.

- Respecting and caring for the land and others means respecting oneself.
- Collectively children should be taught stewardship of our land, animals and environment from a very young age.
- Stories about abuse to insects and animals and the effects should be recorded.
- Global warming and the effects to our lives in the north.

Nunavut Arctic College teaching and learning principles

The Board of Governors of the College have adopted ten teaching and learning principles that are to guide staff at the College to help provide learning experiences that are rooted in the IQ principles of the Government of Nunavut.

Nunavut Arctic College is an inclusive institution that:

- 1 Respects and honours Inuit language and culture.
- 2 Involves elders as an integral part of college life.
- 3 Promotes an understanding of Inuit culture and language.
- 4 Values our students' connections to family and community.
- 5 Helps students prepare for meaningful career and healthy lives.
- 6 Places the well being of students first and provides a strong caring network of support.
- 7 Promotes learning as a positive life-changing experience involving the whole person, body-mind-spirit.

- 8 Encourages the personal, professional and academic development of students and staff.
- 9 Ensures learners are active participants in all aspects of learning and evaluation.
- 10 Ensures our graduates meet national standards.

Interviewing an elder

Interviews are widely used to document the knowledge and wisdom of our elders. They preserve and are part of the history of our communities. Elders can also be used to support the recovery and enrichment of language, and for compiling dictionaries and lexicons of specialized words. Researching Inuit knowledge and skills with elders then writing down the oral information, categorizes the information into teachable knowledge and skills that can be used for teaching resources.

With respect to the elders you will be interviewing, let them know what you are going to do with the information that you gathered before you begin. Will it be used for educational purposes in schools? What uses can be made of elders' recordings? Are you going to use it to write a book that you hope to sell? It is important to let the person you want to interview know how you will use the information so they can decide whether they want to go ahead with the interview. If the elder decides to participate it is essential that they be asked to indicate their agreement by signing a consent form.

These guidelines for recording oral history have been developed by the Nunavut Research Institute and the Igloodik Oral History Project. The College recommends that staff and students follow these guidelines when collecting elders' stories.

I Preparation

- A Contact the elder in advance to arrange a time and place. Let the location be the elder's choice, as they usually feel more comfortable in their own space.
- B Explain the subject or topic of the interview to the elder. This gives them time to prepare. If you have time to do some research on the topic it will help a lot to direct the questioning but usually the best interview is two elders discussing a certain topic because they are using advanced terminology and the depth of the language they speak is not the same of the youth.
- C Prepare a list of questions on the topics ahead of time but again they get into more depth when not asked too many questions. Avoid questions that will elicit only a yes or no answer.
- D Make sure your equipment works and you know how to use it. A tape recorder with a microphone which can be plugged into the recorder is the best. Have a pause button on the recorder; the best tapes are 90 minutes.

2 Conducting the interview

- A Establish a quiet location for conducting the interview without interference from outside listeners and noise.
- B Familiarize elders with the contents and options of the consent form and invite them to sign the waiver indicating their informed consent before beginning the interviews. Some issues that need to be considered here include copyright, who may use the information from the interview and how it may be used.

- C Allow the elder to answer each question fully before asking the next question. Do not interrupt while they are talking. Try to make the interview livelier by having a discussion rather than a question and answer session.
- D Interview more than one person on the same topic, ideally at least two other people because their knowledge and experience may vary.

3 Storing the material

- A Label all tapes and give them a number, for example ~ # AE-001 (*AE stands for Arviat Elder*). Include the following on the label
NAME: Person Interviewed
Interviewed By
Date of Interview
- B Always make a master copy of each tape immediately upon completion of the interview(s) and a back-up copy. Translation and transcription should follow as soon as possible after the interview.
- C Do your part to preserve traditional knowledge. Send the original copy for safekeeping to the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife, NWT. They are the experts in preserving these types of documents. If you are using a digital tape recorder or a video camera, the files can be copied onto a computer. If you don't know how to do this, ask a friend or co-worker to help you copy it onto a computer file, CD-ROM or DVD.
- D Share a copy of your final product with the elders who assisted in the interviews. They will be happy to receive a copy.



The remaining elders are the last generation who lived a more-or-less “traditional life on the land”.

The value of storytelling and legends

Although Inuit life has changed significantly over the past century, many traditions continue. Traditional storytelling, mythology, and drum dancing still remain important parts of Inuit culture even today. Family and community are very important too in smaller communities. The Inuktitut language is still spoken in many areas of the Arctic and it is common on local radio. Inuit knowledge is not being passed on in the old way as it was passed on orally through storytelling.

Legends are very old stories that have been passed orally from one generation to the next. This means that the stories are told from memory, not read from a book. Inuit children learned about who they were and how to behave when they listened to these legends. There is a moral to these legends that individuals have to figure out for themselves and gets them thinking. Traditionally, stories were told to amuse listeners, pass on ancestral history, provide lessons in moral conduct, communicate spirituality, and explain the existence of objects in nature.

Inuit elders shared stories but did not provide descriptive details of characters or events. Rather, the Inuit way of telling stories was to lay the events out pragmatically. Without visual information or colourful storybooks, listeners were free to imagine the physical attributes of the characters and their surroundings. *Pisiit* sung when drum dancing usually tell of the individual's experiences and endeavours and were passed on to their namesake. This too has changed drastically because drum dancers are using any song that the singer knows. Inuit usually have their own *pisiq*.

The remaining elders are the last generation who lived a more-or-less “traditional life on the land” and if their knowledge, experiences and history are not recorded now, this valuable information will be lost forever. It is also important to record Inuktitut language of quality and richness that only our elders possess. Inuit youth are becoming deficient in important cultural knowledge and are not listening as much to elders and we are apprehensive about disciplining our children or relatives. Good parental role-modeling is important today, and kinship naming is still very much practiced. Here is a short legend about handling children that one must know about.

Baby that became a ptarmigan

Once there was a woman who had a little baby that was old enough to sit up. They were living in a huge tent. While everyone was outside doing work, the lady also went out leaving the baby to stay in the tent alone. She rushed because she was worried about the baby.

After a very short time she came in again. The baby was still playing sitting up. The baby was not paying any attention to anything and did not look toward the entrance. The mother suddenly felt a deep love for her child and without thinking scared him as she came in. The baby took flight from being frightened. It flew around inside the tent trying to escape from his mother:

As soon as the mother found out what had happened, she stretched out her arms trying to catch her baby and calling him, “Here, here are your breasts”.

Even though she tried ever so hard to get her baby to feed from her breasts, the baby tried to escape through the entrance. The baby finally escaped because it became a ptarmigan. The woman lost her baby.

The moral of this legend is never leave a child alone and to control yourself around the baby. Be careful not to harm or scare the baby even when you feel your heart is going to burst with love for the child. It is common sense that when you scare a baby too much s/he will get sick because of the shock. Young mothers or babysitters are usually trained not to be too loud and to be careful when tending to newborn babies.

Summary

Inuit continue to live their lives largely according to traditional values, cherishing the time they spend on the land, enjoy visiting relatives and friends and eating country foods. It is unfortunate that much of the information needed to thrive in the modern world can be found not through Inuit elders, but through text, CD-ROMs and the internet. Elders are our living libraries. Although elders still continue to play an important and respected role in Inuit society, that role is now endangered.⁹

Traditional culture and values have continued, and will continue, to play an important role in the way that Inuit define themselves. It is evident today that Inuit are still connected to their roots though, when opportunities arise, they leave their communities and live out in the land for a time. It is hoped that the information in this booklet assists the reader in gaining a greater knowledge and better understanding in working with Inuit elders. As for newcomers to the north, my best advice for you is to connect and interact with the Inuit as much as you can. Be one with them, don't think you are different.

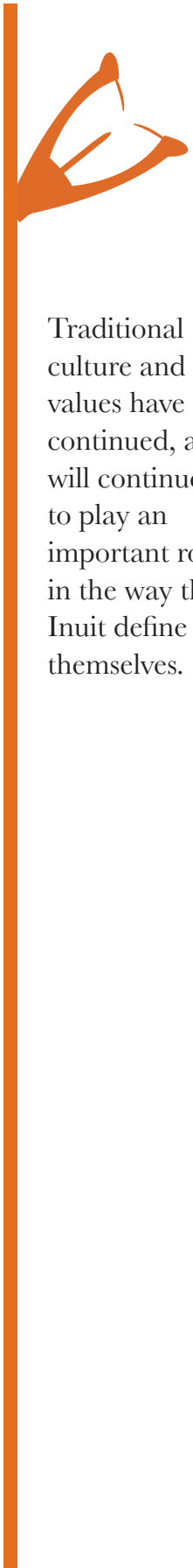
This short paragraph from an elder says a lot that one must strive to do in order to survive as was Inuit custom. If we all try to live by his good advice our communities and workplaces in Nunavut will become stronger and more productive.

The word unity meant a lot to the Inuit in days gone by. It meant helping one another and caring for each other because in those days one could not live alone without regard for other people. That's why we are here today: because our fathers and mothers and grandparents worked and helped one another so we would live to see this day. In the past, it was Inuit old people who had to be left behind so younger people could go on living, bringing up children, and helping children learn to help one another.

In that way, Inuit would grow in large numbers and be proud of what they are. Although it was hard work, it united our people in a way that very few people are ever united. The word unity means to work with one another so that we may live as our fathers did; they had the hope that we could do this. To me, that is what it means to be united to our ancestors.

... I feel that if we learn again to live in unity as our ancestors did, we will be able to live and work together as a strong people and let the rest of the world know we exist and that we are proud to be what we are.

John Pudnak, Ajumarmat, 1977



Traditional culture and values have continued, and will continue, to play an important role in the way that Inuit define themselves.

⁹ Living with Change by Rachel Attituuq Qitsualik

Working with Inuit elders

Activity 1 – Questions for reflection

Learners answer questions about working with elders

1. What are the impacts due to colonization that impaired Inuit elders?

2. What is it with Inuit custom that a younger person should not do to an elder?

3. In the past when Inuit lived in the land, pedagogy was strongly based upon what?

4. What are the reasons an elder should be respected?

5. List at least five (5) ways of demonstrating honour and respect that Inuit value.

Activity 2 – Reflection and journal writing

- Write a journal page about an elder you know or role model who may not be an elder. It could be about how s/he influenced you in your life.
- Reflect on how you would work with an elder and some of the things you would have to remember in order to show respect.

Working with Inuit elders

Activity 3 – Discussion and extended activities

Discussion

- What do you think of the ways Inuit show respect to their elders? Is it similar to other cultures? Were there any new things that you learned? If yes, what?
- If you were to live the way the Inuit elders lived long ago, how do you think you would cope? How is it different today from how the elders lived then? Compare the differences of life years ago to modern day living.
- What do you think of colonization? Do you think that Inuit leaders have taken action to help Inuit deal with what they have gone through in the past? This is a sensitive issue that some elders may not be willing to discuss. Some elders however, recognize that Inuit today have to understand the issues of the past in order to move forward. If the impacts of colonization come up in discussion it may lead to an emotional reaction in learners. This is not necessarily a bad thing but you should be prepared for it and make sure there are support mechanisms available.
- What more should the federal and Nunavut governments do for the healing of the Inuit? What kinds of tools and facilities are needed for northern communities?

Extended activities

- Learning Inuktitut as a second language offered to GN employees through Nunavut Arctic College.
- Learning language through Inuktitut expressions and terms related to work environments that will make language lessons more useful. List terms or phrases that would be useful in Inuktitut (ie: are they at a meeting, traveling?).
- Activities focused on non-verbal communication can be learned. They may be useful for employees working with the public in understanding facial expressions and body gestures. This can help lessen the probabilities of miscommunication.
- Make a collage related to an Inuit elder.

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (traditional knowledge)

Activity 1 – Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit journal writing

- In your own words describe what IQ means to you and if it is important and why.
- What is the meaning of *Pinasuaqtavut* and the four main areas for GN goals and commitments? Read the document and write down the important ideas.
- Make an extended family tree.

Activity 2 – K-W-L

- Ask learners about what they already know about IQ. Have them fill in the **K** column before they read the book. Write down everything they already know.
- What do they want to know more about Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit? Learners fill in the **W** column before they read the book. They can write down things they want to learn about the topic. This helps them to have a purpose for reading and focuses their attention on key ideas. Post in the classroom.
- After the learners have read the book, fill in the **L** column. They can fill in the new knowledge they gained. They can also check the information in the **K** column to see it is correct.
- Using a highlighter to record prior knowledge and another colour to record what information was added after reading the book.

K stands for Know

What do I already **Know** about this topic?

W stands for Will or Want

What do I think I **will** learn about this topic?

What do I **want** to know about this topic?

L stands for Learned

What have I **learned** about this topic?

Activity 3 – Discussion and brainstorming session

- List all the IQ guiding principles and their meanings and discuss it.
- Are these principles used in our communities? If yes, which ones and in what way?
- Global warming issues in the Arctic, and the effects on the animal that we eat and the environment.
- Substance abuse such as drugs and alcohol and the effects on both the youth and the elders.
- What are responsible behaviours that seek to improve and protect the relationship in ways that meet global challenges to environmental wellness?

Activity 4 – Essay writing

- How these IQ guiding principles can be used in our workplaces.
- How can we demonstrate empowerment to lead a successful, respectful and productive life?
- Make a list of programs offered in your area, what project would you be interested in participating and why (*Somebody's Daughter*, meat drying camp, hunting trip etc.)?
- Write about what you think of NAC's teaching and learning principles.

Interviewing an elder

Activity 1 – Interviewing an elder

- Interviewing is a very important project that all communities should be doing for their own history collection as well as preserving different dialects.
- Make a list of equipment that is needed before the interview.
- Collect all equipment to be used and make sure it is working properly. Video cameras are usually the best if the person you are going to interview agrees.
- Questions should be prepared in advance, just in case the elder prefers to go through this process. Interview more than one person on the same subject or try to get two elders to speak on a subject for richer terminology.

Activity 2 – Transcribing

- Inuktitut keyboarding would have to be learned before they can start the transcribing of the tapes and they have to be fluent in Inuktitut.
- The students would have to know basic computer techniques.
- Pick out words from the elder's recording that are new to the learner. Find out the meaning of the word and make lists of new ones.

Activity 3 – Making teaching materials using oral histories

- Make board games, dice games.
- Collect terms for a dictionary and write down the meanings.
- Collection of materials – audio, video and photographs that can be used by other people in the future, making booklets or other resources.

Storytelling and legends

Activity 1 – Booklet making

Research and read some Inuit legends, pick your favourite and write it down in your own words then illustrate it to make a booklet. Write down the moral of the legends and the lesson learned from it and any other information that you think is important to mention. Write down learning activities of the legend.

Activity 2 – Recording legends

Before you visit an elder to record legends, find out who would be the best person to visit who knows some legends. Collect all equipment to be used and make sure they are working properly; make a list of equipment that is needed before you go to the elder. You can record as many stories as time allows if the stories are short.

Activity 3 – Terminology collection

As you are reading the legends write down words that you do not understand, and then have a group discussion about the words that are new to you and find out what they mean.